

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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CRITICAL HABITAT FOR HOUSTON TOAD DETERMINED

Critical habitat for what is probably the rarest and most endangered amphibian in the United States, the Houston toad, has been determined by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Keith M. Schreiner announced today. This notice was published in the January 31, 1978, Federal Register.

An estimated 1,000 to 1,500 toads are thought to be present in scattered localities in central and southeastern Texas. This shy animal has been listed as endangered since 1970.

The best populations of the Houston toad are not in Houston itself, but in Bastrop and Burleson Counties. Extensive surveys by a scientist under contract to the Service have shown the toad to survive best near the town of Bastrop in an area which includes two Texas State Parks. The other locality, near Cadwell in Burleson County, has a much smaller but still viable population of the toad. These two areas have been designated as critical habitat.

The critical habitat determination means that all Federal agencies must insure that actions they authorize or fund do not adversely affect the Houston toad's remaining habitat. No actions are automatically prohibited by this determination, however. Since much of the hope for the survival of this species depends upon the maintenance of suitable and undisturbed habitat, this determination should aid the Houston toad in its struggle for survival.

Five areas in the suburbs of Houston in Harris County that may still contain small remnant populations of the Houston toad are to be the subject of further study by scientists to determine if the toad still uses these areas. A decision on these five areas, which are threatened by agricultural and urban expansion, has been postponed until the study is completed. Within these five areas, those sites that have already been developed will not be studied because there is little or no chance that the toad could exist in these altered habitats. In addition, all developed areas within the two critical habitat areas are automatically excluded from the final designation.

Two areas originally proposed as critical habitat in Harris County have been eliminated from further consideration because they have been so modified by residential, commercial, and industrial development as to preclude the existence of the toads there.

The Houston toad is very shy and secretive, and its habits make it rarely seen or heard. However, with proper care and management, the Service believes it stands a good chance of survival.

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